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ABSTRACT

To learn about the problems inherent in the testing of basic skills and how these problems might be solved, the University of Cincinnati administered the "Pre-Professional Skills Test" (P-PST) to its junior education majors. Using a cut-off score of 170 on the P-PST, 30 students were found to need remediation in reading. These students were then administered the "Advanced Reading Inventory: Grade Seven Through College," and those who scored at the twelfth grade instructional level were excused from the remedial reading course. Those who received remedial instruction were also given the "Attitude Toward Reading" scale. The "Degrees of Reading Power" (DRP) test was selected as the exit test for these students. Students who scored at the twelfth grade instructional level on the DRP were allowed to register for student teaching. Their improved test results demonstrated that the reading achievement of prospective teachers can be improved with instruction, but not their attitude toward reading. (HOD)

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TESTING AND REMEDIATING EDUCATION MAJORS' BASIC SKILLS

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TESTING AND REMEDIATING EDUCATION MAJORS' BASIC SKILLS

Background

Teacher competency! This issue sparks controversies which even educators fiercely debate. This movement was spawned from the minimum competency testing of students and developed quickly. Today, the testing of prospective teachers' and teachers' basic skills is an accomplished fact. It occurs for two reasons. First, because of the citizens' belief that education in the United States is either disastrous at worst or mediocre at best. These citizens protested vociferously until state legislators began to enact laws requiring the testing of schoolchildren and teachers. Secondly, because of educators' concerns about the prospective teachers' and teachers' basic and professional skills. Educators want to stipulate educational policy and they have begun to convince State Boards of Education members that they must not only become involved in this movement but also provide more leadership in certification and licensing matters. If educators wish to maintain or regain control of educational policy, however, they must conduct research and resolve the problems inherent in the teacher competency issue.

The University of Cincinnati initiated a screening program of its junior education majors during the 1983-1984 academic year in order to learn about the problems inherent in the testing of basic skills and how these problems might be solved.

Also, the University hoped to determine whether remedial courses could resolve these prospective teachers' problems so that they could become successful teachers.

The University of Cincinnati is a comprehensive, state-supported school located in Cincinnati, Ohio. Approximately 36,500 students enrolled at the University for the 1984-1985 academic year. The College of Education serves 2,232 students. Of these students, 1,085 students are undergraduates. Almost 300 candidates are recommended for State Teaching Certificates each year.

The College Senate voted to administer The Pre-Professional Skills Test, developed by Educational Testing Service, to its junior education majors to evaluate their basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. The Senate also enacted a policy requiring all undergraduate education majors to submit P-PST scores at least one academic year before they planned to student teach. Thus, no student can student teach until he/she has demonstrated competency in these basic skills.

The first College-sponsored administration of the P-PST occurred on November 26, 1983. One hundred and eighty-nine junior education majors were administered the P-PST (See Table 1 for a frequency distribution of their scores.).

The selection of a cut-off score presented a significant concern. A Standard-Setting Team was appointed and after much discussion and the use of the Nedelsky method, a cut-off score

of 170 was voted the cut-off score for the November, 1983, administration of the P-PST (See Table 2 for cut-off scores selected by other groups.). This Standard-Setting Team wanted to review the cut-off score after each administration of the P-PST because they hope to raise the cut-off score so that it becomes equivalent with the cut-off scores selected by other agencies.

The Study

With the selection of the cut-off score of 170, 30 students required remediation in reading (See Table 3 for the student dispersion.). Two students withdrew from the University reducing the number to 28 students.

Because errors could have occurred during the P-PST testing and because the University wanted to be fair to its students, these 28 students were administered the Advanced Reading Inventory: Grade Seven Through College during the weeks of March 5-March 16, 1984. Nine reading specialists administered this test, individually, to at least three students.

The test consisted of three parts. Part 1, the student read a passage orally and answered questions about it without looking at the passage. The reading specialist timed the student's oral reading to learn his/her reading rate. Part 2, the student read graded lists of words until he/she reached the frustration or the college level. Part 3, the student read a

passage silently and answered questions about it without referring to the passage. Once again, the reading specialist timed the student's reading.

Those students who scored Twelfth Grade, Instructional Level, were excused from the reading remedial course. Their performance on this test demonstrated their competence in reading. Six students scored Twelfth Grade, Instructional Level, and were excused from remediation. Now, 22 students remained.

The University hired two instructors from its Developmental Reading Program to develop and teach the reading remedial course. Both instructors have doctorates, are reading specialists, and have 15-20 years' experience teaching reading. In turn, they hired two reading specialists to help them individualize the reading instruction. The University paid for this course; however, the students were required to purchase the textbook.

Of the 22 students who scored below 170 in reading, only 13 students enrolled for the reading instruction. All 13 students were females.

The reading instruction began on March 30, 1984. It lasted for 10 weeks or until June 1, 1984. The class met from 2:00-4:50 p.m. each Friday.

The Degrees of Reading Power test was selected as the exit test (See Table 4 for a sample passage.). The DRP test presents prose passages on a variety of nonfiction topics. Each passage

contains about 325 words. Test items are formed by deleting seven words in each passage. For each deletion, five single-word response options are offered. Students select the most appropriate response. Altogether, there are 98 test items. The DRP is a power test so students must be allowed time to complete the test.

Students who scored a raw score of 71 or Twelfth Grade, Instructional Level, on the DRP demonstrated their competency in reading and were allowed to register for student teaching. The 13 students receiving the reading instruction were administered this test on June 1, 1984. The 9 students who did not receive the reading remediation also were administered this test sometime between June 1-June 6, 1984. All 22 students passed the DRP test.

In addition, the students' reading attitudes were evaluated. The 13 students completed Weidler & Askov's Attitude Toward Reading one of the first three weeks of class as a pretest. These students completed it again on June 1, 1984, as a posttest. The 9 students who did not take the remedial course also were administered the Attitude Toward Reading during the first week of June.

This reading attitude survey contains 26 Likert scale items. Thirteen of the sentences are positive and 13 are negative. The students read a sentence and then selected one of five responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly

disagree. Then, the students wrote the appropriate letter in the blank.

The Results

No significant difference existed between the experimental group's pretest and posttest means on the Attitude Toward Reading scale (See Table 5 for the groups' reading attitude means.). Also, no significant difference existed between the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups in this survey.

The Attitude Toward Reading scores can range from 26-130. Hence, a mean of 76-77 would indicate these students' neutral feelings about reading. They neither like nor dislike reading. They express no strong feeling about it.

However, a significant difference did exist between the experimental and control group's scores on the DRP test (See Table 6 for the groups' DRP test means and DRP test times.). Also, a significant difference existed between their DRP test times. The experimental group allotted an average of 1 hour and 53 minutes to complete the test, but the control group spent an average of only 1 hour and 16 minutes completing it. Therefore, the experimental group devoted about 40 minutes more to taking the test. The average score for the control group was 86. The average score for the experimental group was 94.

Conclusions

What do these results mean? First, even with these small groups, a significant difference existed between the experimental and control group's reading achievement posttest means. Furthermore, those students who allotted more time to completing this test scored higher than students who invested less time to taking the test. Thus, the reading achievement of prospective teachers can be improved with instruction.

Thirdly, these experimental and control group students are "neutral" about reading. They express no strong feeling about reading; they are indifferent to it. Finally, the reading instruction did not change these experimental students' attitudes about reading. However, the instruction lasted only 10 weeks.

Because of the small numbers in each group, it is hoped that similar studies will be conducted to learn whether the significant difference in reading achievement can be supported. However, a different exit test, similar to the P-PST reading, should be employed. It is difficult to compare results of a timed and a power test. Also, changing the course time of Friday afternoon from 2:00-4:50 p.m. might increase class attendance and, thus, promote more learning.

This study indicates that we can assist prospective teachers to become more competent in reading. However, this study prompts three new questions: (1) What occurred during these 30 hours of instruction that helped these 13 students

score higher than the 9 students who had no instruction? (2) Can we discover methods for changing these prospective teachers' feelings about reading? (3) Do we want teachers who are only neutral about reading, instructing children? Perhaps a teacher's attitude about reading does not affect his/her competency in teaching reading. But can this teacher's attitude affect students so that they, too, become only "neutral" or "indifferent" to reading?

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Appendix

TABLE 1

P-PST FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION
(NOVEMBER, 1983)

SCORE	READING	WRITING	MATHEMATICS
Above 187	3		8
184-187	17	7	19
180-183	35	27	44
176-179	52	55	43
172-175	36	68	30
168-171	26	19	17
164-167	15	9	15
160-163	4	2	10
Below 160	1	2	3

TABLE 2

MINIMUM P-PST SCORES

AGENCY	PURPOSE	READING SCORE
Ohio Council For Academic Excellence (Recommended Scores)	Initial Employment	177
Houston Independent School District	Initial Employment	174
Delaware State Department of Education	Initial Certification	175
Texas Education Agency	Admission to Teacher Education Programs	172 (1985) 174 (1986)
Temple University	Admission to Teacher Education Programs	172
University of Cincinnati	Identify Students Needing Remediation Prior to Student Teaching	170

TABLE 3

STUDENT DISPERSION

CATEGORY	NUMBER
Total Students Taking the P-PST	189
Total Students Demonstrating Competency on the P-PST Reading	159
Total Students Requiring Remediation (P-PST Reading Score Below 170)	30
Students Who Withdrew From the University	2
Students Who Demonstrated Competency on the Advanced Reading Inventory	6
Students Who Enrolled for the Remedial Reading Course	13
Students Who Did Not Enroll for the Remedial Reading Course	9

TABLE 4

DRP TEST SAMPLE

Calcium is important for our health. We must have it in our diet to stay well. A good place to get it is from dairy products like milk, cheese and ice cream. One pound of cheese has fifty times the calcium we should have every day. Other ____1____ have less. For example, a pound of beans also has calcium. But it has only three times the amount we ought to have daily.

1. (a) foods
   (b) gases
   (c) countries
   (d) oceans
   (e) animals

Calcium helps build strong bones and teeth. When we are born, our bones are soft. Then we ____2____. By the time childhood ends, the bones are much harder. A change takes place as we age. Over the years calcium is deposited in the bones. It makes them hard. But even adults must have calcium every day. The ____3____ is still there. Otherwise the bones would become weak. They would break more often. They would not mend as quickly.

2. (a) remember
   (b) tire
   (c) pause
   (d) move
   (e) grow

3. (a) form
   (b) supply
   (c) hole
   (d) need
   (e) material

TABLE 5

READING ATTITUDE MEANS

	Pretest		Posttest	
	Number	Score	Number	Score
Experimental	11	77	12	77
Control			9	76

TABLE 6

DRP TEST MEANS

	Number	Score	Test-Taking Time (Minutes)
Experimental	13	94	113
Control	9	86	77